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# 'A La Mode De Bourgoigne?' The 'Burgundian' Ceremonial at the Court of Albert and Isabella in Brussels (1598–1621)

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## ABSTRACT

In 1599 the Archdukes Albert and Isabella introduced a new ceremonial at their court in Brussels. Cobbled from the model that was in vogue at the royal court of Madrid, it was known as the 'Burgundian' ceremonial, as its origins could be traced back to the renowned court of the Dukes of Burgundy during whose reign the court of Brussels had thrived as never before. Strangely, the reforms met plenty of criticism among the courtiers, who accused the archdukes of putting aside time-honoured local traditions. The 'Burgundian' ceremonial was experienced by the Netherlandish nobility not only as 'new' but also as 'foreign', indicating that it was no longer recognizable as a direct derivative of the age-old tradition in Brussels. This article examines the origins of the ceremonial at the archducal court and shows how and why it came to deviate from the model that had traditionally been maintained in the Burgundian Netherlands.

## KEYWORDS

Habsburg Netherlands;  
courts; ceremonial;  
archdukes; Brussels;  
Burgundy

## Introduction

In September 1599 the Archdukes Albert and Isabella, sovereign rulers of the Habsburg Netherlands (r. 1598–1621), announced that no less than six aristocrats originating from the Low Countries would be appointed knights in the Order of the Golden Fleece. The announcement involved Prince Philip William of Orange – the eldest son of William the Silent – and furthermore the Duke of Aarschot, the Marquis of Havré and the Counts of Ligne, Egmont and Solre.<sup>1</sup> The Order of the Golden Fleece, instituted in 1430 by the Burgundian Duke Philip the Good, was one of the most prestigious orders of chivalry in Europe. Ever since the Habsburgs had succeeded their Burgundian predecessors, the Order was presided over by the king of Spain, who as its grandmaster had the right to designate new members. This prestigious mark of honour was quite desired, and there is little doubt that the selection of six leading noblemen from the Netherlands was part of a well-considered strategy, designed to tighten the weakened bonds between the Habsburg dynasty and its Netherlandish vassals anew following the turbulent first half of the Dutch Revolt.<sup>2</sup>

The round of appointments proved, however, to have yet another favourable side-effect. Ottavio Mirto Frangipani, the papal nuncio at the court of Brussels at that time,

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reported that the announcement had a calming effect on the heated feelings of the courtiers, which had flared high on the occasion of the introduction of a new court ceremonial. Based on the example of the Spanish court in Madrid, one of the new elements included the high nobility's being no longer permitted to kneel on cushions specially provided for the celebration of the Mass – a prerogative that not only spared their knees, but was also seen as an important symbol of distinction.<sup>3</sup> Another measure concerned stricter control of access to the princely apartments, whereby the nobles were no longer authorized to approach the princes whenever they wished. According to the nuncio, these new rules received quite a lot of criticism. The nobility accused Archduke Albert of putting aside local traditions and of wanting to organize his court just like that of the king of Spain. In view of the fact that Albert himself was no king, the courtiers saw the reforms as excessive and inappropriate.<sup>4</sup>

In an insightful article about the symbolic value of the court at Brussels, Krista De Jonge notes that there is something remarkable going on with this criticism.<sup>5</sup> The courtiers were of the opinion that the reforms of 1599 went against the age-old traditions in the Low Countries. They saw the new court ceremonial as something 'Spanish', not in keeping with the rules they had always been used to in Brussels. That is remarkable in view of the fact that Spanish etiquette at that time was in essence based on regulations that had formerly been in force at the court of the Dukes of Burgundy, and that had thus – to a large extent – come to be developed in Brussels.<sup>6</sup> This Burgundian model later made its entry at the Spanish court under Charles V, where his son Philip II adopted it afterward. Consequently, the Spanish ceremonial was a direct derivative of the tradition that had been maintained in the Netherlands for ages. Yet the reforms of 1599 were experienced by the local courtiers not only as 'new', but also as 'foreign'. This indicates that, since its introduction at court in Madrid, the Burgundian ceremonial had fundamentally deviated from the rules that had always been in vogue at the Brussels court, to the extent that it was no longer recognizable when it was introduced there anew.<sup>7</sup>

In light of all this, it is rather curious to find that around the same time when the Brussels courtiers began to raise their complaints, their counterparts in Spain started to openly voice criticism about the ceremonial that was being used at the court in Madrid. Here, the accession of King Philip III, Isabella's half-brother, to the throne in 1598 had revived earlier tensions over the organization and composition of the royal household, which during the reign of his father Philip II had consisted of a Castilian branch – the *Casa de Castilla* – and a Burgundian branch – the *Casa de Borgoña*. Concerned about the new monarch's attempts to curtail the political influence of the Castilian nobility, the courtiers in Madrid expressed their disagreement with the dominant role of the Burgundian service, which was scorned as being 'barbarous' and 'foreign', and not in keeping with the age-old Spanish tradition.<sup>8</sup> Apparently then, in Brussels the model that was known to contemporaries as 'Burgundian' was suddenly considered 'too Spanish', whereas in Madrid it was considered 'not Spanish enough'. This raises the question as to what exactly the term 'Burgundian' had come to signify over the years, especially given the importance that has always been attached to the influence of the court of Burgundy on the development of various courtly traditions in Europe.<sup>9</sup> The Burgundian legacy has been studied extensively in relation to several European courts, but seldom in relation to the Habsburg court of

Brussels, which has always remained somewhat under the radar in the historiography concerned.<sup>10</sup> This article aims to shed light on the origins of the ceremonial at the court of the Archdukes Albert and Isabella – understood in this article as the rituals and ceremonial rules and regulations that structured daily life in the archducal household – and to examine how it came to differ from the model that had once been maintained in the Burgundian Netherlands. In addition, it seeks to explain why the new rules met so much criticism when they were first introduced (although perhaps, as will be discussed below, the term ‘re-introduced’ is more suitable) in 1599.

## The Burgundian Legacy

In his *Relationi* Guido Bentivoglio, who as Frangipani’s successor held the position of the apostolic nuncio in Brussels between 1607 and 1615, gave a short description of the court and household of Albert and Isabella. ‘The court of the archdukes,’ Bentivoglio noted, ‘is composed like that of the other Habsburg princes, who in general have modeled their courts according to the example of the Dukes of Burgundy’. A few pages on, he added that ‘in general, it can be posited that [the courts of Brussels and Madrid] are cobbled from the same model.’<sup>11</sup> It is undoubtedly true that the organization of the archducal household would have been recognized by many contemporaries as a copy of that of the royal household in Spain – itself a derivative of the model that had come to be developed at the court of the Burgundian dukes.<sup>12</sup> Just like the *Casa de Borgoña* in Madrid, the household of Albert and Isabella numbered four overarching divisions: the *Capilla* or Court Chapel provided for the religious services and the musical ministrations, while the *Casa* (House), the *Cámara* (Chamber) and the *Caballeriza* (Mews) jointly attended to the service of the archdukes. The palace guard or *Guarda* held a peculiar position in the sense that it did not directly make up part of the actual household, but was responsible for the physical security of the archdukes and – in a broader context – for the monitoring of their residence and entourage. Each division was in its turn subdivided into several departments, which were responsible for well-described duties. As far as can be gleaned from the historical sources, most noble courtiers served here on a four-monthly basis. In addition, daily life at the Brussels court was highly ritualized and ran according to a set of strict rules and regulations, all of which must have been duly noted down in court ordinances that, sadly, have not survived. That is most unfortunate, for although such ordinances are of a normative nature and thus only describe the court in theory, they could nevertheless offer valuable information concerning the ideal that the archducal household was supposed to answer to.<sup>13</sup> In this case it means that this article will have to make do with other types of sources that reflect the required information often less accurately or only partially. Thus, it comes down to compensating for the lack of court ordinances with indirect data from chronicles, travelogues, accounts, personnel rosters, correspondence, and so forth.

The above description, it seems, bears a striking resemblance to what we know about the famous court of the Burgundian dukes. Even so, the conclusion of the nuncio – that the courts of Brussels and Madrid had been modeled after the example of the court of Burgundy – needs to be placed in the right context. For one thing, most princely households in Europe shared a similar structure to the one described

here, and this was already the case in the Middle Ages. To refer to this organization as specifically ‘Burgundian’ would thus be incorrect. Furthermore, at the beginning of the seventeenth century the organization of the court Bentivoglio was talking about still recalled the original Burgundian tradition only to a limited extent. That tradition had come to be developed two centuries before that and would acquire great luster through the memoirs of the Burgundian chronicler – and master of the household to Duke Charles the Bold – Olivier de La Marche (1426–1502).<sup>14</sup> Based on the late-medieval example of the French court, yet possibly also hearkening back to influences from the seigniorial courts in the county of Flanders and the duchy of Brabant, the household of the Burgundian dukes was characterized, among other things, by a very hierarchically built structure and great participation from the nobility. In addition to the personal quarters of the prince (the *Chambre*), that structure consisted of six domestic departments: the *Paneterie*, the *Échansonnerie*, the *Cuisine*, the *Fruiterie*, the *Écuyerie* and the *Fourrière*.<sup>15</sup> While the court steward directed the household from day to day, noble *écuyers* in turn made up the servants in the different divisions, serving on a four-monthly basis – the so-called system of *service par terme*. The range of their responsibilities consisted among other things of serving the duke at table, and the strict etiquette followed in doing so not only provided for an impressive visual spectacle but also solidified the elevated position of the prince. To an increasing extent his role as *primus inter pares* had to make room for an emphatically distinct status as rightful and chosen ruler. The serving presence of nobles in the princely entourage was thus in several respects significant. In the first instance their participation in the care of the duke affirmed the bonds of loyalty between the regime and the social elites. At the same time the introduction of a refined court ceremonial and the concomitant distribution of domestic positions of honour created new possibilities for the nobility to profile itself as the leading social class. Whereas the norms and values of the second estate had rested for ages on its role in warfare, now room was also made for a frame of reference in which life at court occupied a central position.<sup>16</sup>

While the years advanced, the structure of the Burgundian household remained to a great extent unmodified. Rather than a method of creating order in the household, the court ceremonial made up part of a conscious political strategy that served to confirm its continuity with previous regimes. That tradition was continued even after the complex of Burgundian lands were incorporated into the Habsburg possessions. The court ordinances drawn up in 1497 for Philip the Fair and in 1515 for his son Charles V were clearly inspired by the ideal that Olivier de La Marche had described in his memoirs.<sup>17</sup> Yet after the passage of time many modifications would be applied. When in 1545 Charles’s court controller Jean Sigoney embarked upon a revision of the ceremonial, he concluded, dissatisfied in a way, that only the service at table was still in keeping with the old Burgundian customs that the emperor’s predecessors had observed.<sup>18</sup> Above all, adjustments had been put through with regard to the protection of the personal life of the prince.<sup>19</sup> If in the foreground the table ceremonial exhibited more and more similarity with a strictly orchestrated, public glorification of the princely *persona*, then in the background the privacy and isolation of his physical *person* were taken into account to an increasing extent. That was expressed, among other things, in the ordinances of 1497 and 1515, which contained clear guidelines concerning the access to the princely apartments.<sup>20</sup> At the same time new architectural arrangements,

like the expansion of the number of antechambers, saw to it that the private life of the ruler was withdrawn from view more and more. With time the creation of detachment would in that way come to make up part of the consecration of the prince, which was elementary in the Burgundian court ceremonial.

All the same, during the reign of Charles V (r. 1506–1556) another important development arose, which would prove to be defining for the further evolution of the Burgundian court model. After the death of his grandfather Ferdinand of Aragon in 1516, the young Charles journeyed to the Iberian Peninsula to claim the crown of the Spanish hereditary lands. He did not take them into hand without much effort, though. Only two years later, in 1518, would the *cortes* of Castile and Aragon swear loyalty to their new prince. It produced a noticeable territorial expansion for Charles, which, to be sure, also brought a great deal of problems along with it. In cultural, political and institutional respects his territorial patrimonium was characterized by enormous diversity. The wariness of the Spanish populace toward his councilors, who had come primarily from the Low Countries, led rather quickly to complaints about the greed of these *flamencos*, with Charles's confidant Guillaume de Croÿ as the main target.<sup>21</sup> Should the king want his as yet unstable regime to acquire the necessary legitimacy, then he needed to meet the characteristic regional identities as well as their attained rights up to a certain degree. His decision to maintain the existing royal household in Castile – albeit with the necessary reforms – played along with that. More than any other institution the *Casa y Corte de Castilla* constituted the incarnation *par excellence* of the kingdom of Castile. Seen politically, its complete replacement with a court organization cobbled from the Burgundian model was therefore unthinkable. Of necessity, the *Casa de Castilla* would continue to function during the following decades of Charles's reign independently of the *Casa de Borgoña*, though at the same time Castile would exercise much influence upon Burgundy.<sup>22</sup>

In 1531 Charles, having meanwhile been elected emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, entrusted the administration of the Netherlands to his sister Mary, the widow of the fallen King Louis II of Hungary. As opposed to her predecessor Margaret of Austria, whose court was in nearby Mechelen, the new governess settled into the palace of Brussels. In view of the fact that the emperor was mostly abroad, the former residence of the Dukes of Brabant on the city's Coudenberg hill had for a few decades only been sporadically inhabited. Charles permitted his sister to introduce a new household there and left her the choice between a ceremonial *à la mode d'Austria* – by which he meant the hereditary Habsburg lands of Austria and Hungary – or one *à la mode de Bourgoigne*.<sup>23</sup> In emulation of the old tradition Mary chose the Burgundian model. On account of the difference in status – gubernatorial versus sovereign – but also because it concerned in essence the entourage of a woman, Mary's household would deviate on different points from that of her brother, though. The court ordinance that was drawn up for her in 1555, gave for example much less attention to the rules of access for the *Chambre*, which undoubtedly had to do with the fact that Mary could make no claim on the ideal of splendid isolation reserved for sovereign princes.<sup>24</sup>

After the death of Charles V in 1558, his son and successor Philip II settled permanently in Spain. Already in 1535, the then eight-year-old Philip had received his own household in the Castilian style, which, to be sure, was strongly influenced by

traditions from Aragon and Portugal.<sup>25</sup> In 1548, at the command of his father Philip's household was completely reorganized according to the Burgundian model, in conformity with the new ordinance drawn up by Jean Sigoney.<sup>26</sup> Although the reorganization was received under much protest, political motivations lay at the basis of the decision.<sup>27</sup> With the introduction of a Burgundian court ceremonial, typified by great participation from the nobility, the emperor wanted to promote the integration of the social elites – coming from diverse corners of the Habsburg realm – into the entourage of his son.<sup>28</sup> Seen politically, however, it was still unthinkable to do away with the *Casa de Castilla* altogether. Although very reduced in scope, this *Casa* continued to exist alongside the *Casa de Borgoña*, with mutual influence and even a partial overlap as a consequence. Even so, as far as the personal care of the prince and his family was concerned, the Burgundian household was preferred over its Castilian pendant, which in the words of Mia Rodríguez-Salgado was characterized instead by 'an odd assortment of offices' of which, above all, the Court Chapel and the division of the hunt mattered.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, the coexistence of both traditions was characteristic for the reign of Philip II, and the evolution of the Burgundian ceremonial in the second half of the sixteenth century can only be grasped in light of the influence of the *Casa de Castilla*. By the end of Philip's reign, therefore, the Spanish ceremonial deviated significantly from what once had been the norm at the court of Burgundy.

### Splendid Isolation

While the court of Madrid gradually developed into one of the most impressive of Europe, the Brussels court had to surrender quite a lot of its former luster. Political circumstances hindered its expansion as a stable administrative and cultural center, and the relatively rapid succession of governors after Mary of Hungary saw to it that even their respective entourages were not allotted any long life. Under Margaret of Parma (r. 1559–1567) the Burgundian ceremonial continued more or less to be maintained, but after that its evolution becomes unclear.<sup>30</sup> Court ordinances are wanting for this period, and it is still questionable whether governors-general who were not of royal blood, such as the Duke of Alba and Luis de Requeséns, did indeed keep a household in the classic sense of the word. More than likely they had a limited entourage at their disposal, yet their peculiar status prevented them from conducting a court roster on a princely scale. Then again, the household that Archduke Ernest – Albert's brother and predecessor as governor in the Low Countries – brought along with him to Brussels in 1594 was based on the Austrian court model that was current in Central Europe.<sup>31</sup> Though also originally inspired by the Burgundian example, this model, too, had evolved very much over the years, such that in the meantime it differed fundamentally from the tradition familiar in Brussels.<sup>32</sup> Ernest passed away after a year and a half in office, allowing little time for this Austrian model to 'sink in' or for the local nobles to adjust to it. Finally, when Archduke Albert, then still a bachelor and a cardinal of the Church, was asked by King Philip II to succeed his brother as governor in Brussels in 1596, it can be assumed that the ceremonial changed again. However, again due to a lack of ordinances, we know very little about the court ceremonial in this particular period in time prior to Albert's wedding to the infanta and their joint appointment as co-sovereigns of the Habsburg Netherlands. But we do know that the structure of the



archduke's household resembled that of the royal household in Madrid, and that the public dining ritual, at least, was reminiscent of the traditional Burgundian table etiquette mentioned above. In his memoirs, the Frisian nobleman Frederik van Vervou, who visited the court of Brussels in 1597, noted that he had attended the public meal of the archduke in the palace, where he had been able to see that Albert was waited on with ritual respect by his courtiers, who served him food and drink while sitting on their knees.<sup>33</sup>

Clearly, then, at the end of the sixteenth century, what the courtiers in Brussels were used to in terms of court ceremonial must have been a rather mixed bag – an amalgam of rituals, rules and regulations that stemmed from different courtly traditions. It is therefore unclear what exactly it was that they considered 'typical' for the Brussels court, or why the new ceremonial introduced by the archdukes in 1599 came across as new and foreign. Apparently, the new rules were considered 'Spanish', but most courtiers serving at this time would have had no good means of comparison with other models, and little recollection of earlier reigns in the Low Countries when the 'traditional' Burgundian ceremonial had still been in vogue. Chances are therefore that their reluctance to accept the new rules was based on a rather blurry understanding of what the Burgundian ceremonial implied. In fact, we may well assume that the real reason behind the criticism was not so much the fact that the new rules were considered foreign, but rather that they constituted an important restriction of the local aristocracy's time-honoured privileges. Indeed, if the nuncio Frangipani's letter is to be believed, much of the complaints had to do with the fact that the courtiers' free access to the archduke was suddenly curbed, which severely hampered their ability to win the archduke's ear and exert influence on the decision-making process.

In his letter to the cardinal-secretary of state in Rome, Frangipani noted that the new ceremonial implied not only the establishment of new rules regarding the celebration of Mass, but also a reorganization of palace space, the princely apartments now being equipped 'with distinctions between chambers, locked doors, and porters at each entrance (...)'.<sup>34</sup> The new system, providing a better protection of the entrances to the state rooms, was clearly copied from the Spanish court, where access to the king had become an important concern. In addition, the adjustments coincided with the complete renovation of the residential wing of the palace, which had been embarked upon by Archduke Albert in 1598 in preparation for his wedding to the infanta. Whereas this part of the palace on the Coudenberg hill had previously consisted of a simple enfilade of suites, through the addition of a second series of rooms the wing was split in two. By doing this, the internal route leading to the archducal Bedchamber became significantly longer than it had been in previous decades.<sup>35</sup> In this strictly monitored new sequence of chambers and antechambers visitors were now literally 'pre-sorted' according to rank, function, and social status. The spatial arrangement of the residential wing mirrored, as it were, a social hierarchy: the higher on the social ladder one stood, the closer one was allowed to approach the inner sanctum of the palace – and hence, the archduke himself.

Clearly, the new system had a profound impact on daily life at court. Whoever reads over the correspondence of ambassadors and foreign representatives at the court of Brussels discovers at once that the *Cámara* of Archduke Albert held a central, ceremonial status, and that physical proximity to the archduke was seen as a precious



commodity. Although court ordinances on the subject are lacking, other sources suggest that the access to the archducal apartments was henceforth closely guarded. For example, the English nobleman Charles Somerset, who visited the court of Brussels in 1612, recorded in his travel diary:

There is great Ceremonies kept in [the archduke's] Chambers of state; in the first Chamber all Captaines and ordinarie Gentlemen come in, and passe no further; in the second come Coronels and Noblemen of the Countrie; and the thirde is the Chamber where none come but those that are the Grandoes of Spayne, that are alwaies covered before the king, and those of the Order of the Golden Fleece, and also princes of the Countrie, and such princes as shall come unto his Courte, and the Chamber adjoyning next unto the third Chamber, is the Chamber, where the Archduke according unto his accustomed manner everie weeke giveth audience unto any that will come unto him: he sitteth in a chayre, where everie one in his turne hath accesse unto him according as they have given their names up unto the Chamberlan.<sup>36</sup>

Whereas Somerset's description shows that it remained possible in theory to receive an audience with the archduke, it may be assumed that the rules regarding access became much more strict during his reign than they had been in earlier times. This is confirmed by, among others, a report from the French ambassador in Brussels, who was obliged to take his place behind a curtain during the appointment of the Count of Emden as knight of the Golden Fleece – a ceremony that proceeded in Albert's private quarters – because only knights of the Order were allowed to be present in this space. The papal nuncio, too, had to follow the ceremony from behind the curtain, and even the infanta was only allowed to look on from an opening in the doorway.<sup>37</sup> Similar rules applied also to Isabella's quarters, where the *camarera mayor* – the infanta's mistress of the household – monitored the arrangement for access: 'The Infanta her Chamberlan is a woman, and none come within her quarter but women', Charles Somerset wrote.<sup>38</sup> The mistress had to see to it, among other things, that none of the ladies-in-waiting remain behind after services were finished in the infanta's chamber, without having explicitly received permission to do so.<sup>39</sup>

In an important contribution on the courts of the Tudor and Stuart dynasties, John Adamson argues that 'of all the influences on the conduct of politics, none impinged more directly than the allocation and control of space within the palace'.<sup>40</sup> This, it seems, is precisely what happened at the archducal court. By literally distancing themselves from the spying glance of his subjects and denying them access to their chambers, Albert and Isabella strengthened the inviolability and the mystique surrounding their princely personae. As I have argued elsewhere, on a more secular level their physical withdrawal necessitated a reorientation of the patronage networks at court, which became more and more independent of the few persons who were authorized to approach them.<sup>41</sup> Naturally, this provoked the ire of the courtiers, who – as we have seen – complained that Albert was trying to organize his court like that of the king of Spain, which was deemed inappropriate, given the fact that the archduke was no king. This complaint raises the question why Albert and Isabella were so keen on using this new model, despite the criticism. After all, the archdukes would have been keenly aware that the organization of their joint household was not – and could never be – simply a matter of personal preference. Reigning over a country with a history of distrust against all things Spanish, they must have realized that introducing

a Spanish court ceremonial would certainly raise eyebrows. In that sense, the decision to do so was undoubtedly a conscious political choice – and one that served a certain purpose. That purpose will be addressed in the following paragraph.

### **A Semi-Royal Court?**

An important element to remember is that the court ceremonial in Brussels was adapted on the occasion of the wedding of the archdukes in 1598 and that the reforms mentioned above were implemented shortly after their arrival in that city. The reforms were clearly inspired by the court model in vogue at the court in Madrid. In and of itself that need not surprise. Albert and Isabella had both grown up at the court of Philip II, which defined their frame of reference and on top of that enjoyed much prestige in Europe in this time period. Since their childhood their respective households were organized according to the Spanish-Burgundian court ceremonial. It seems consequently nothing more than logical that they wanted to keep the style familiar to them at their court in Brussels. But there was more going on. In terms of organization the archducal household was indeed a copy of its pendant portrait in Madrid. It could be posited just as well, though, that the court in Brussels did not seek so much to connect with the Spanish model as it did with the characteristic dynastic ‘corporate culture’ which the Illustrious House of Austria employed and with which they wished to profile their household in Brussels. The specific religious practice that defined day-to-day life at court, to mention but one aspect, was to a greater or lesser extent a typical characteristic of all Habsburg courts. Profound devotion and spirituality made up part of the Habsburg identity, an identity with which the archdukes – whose marriage stood as a symbol for the unanimity and harmony between both dynastic branches – had been strongly diffused. It could be posited that the archducal court was in the first place a Habsburg court, and one of many that were to be found in Europe at the time. As has been argued in the introduction to an edited volume on this ‘constellation of courts’, all of these Habsburg courts rested on the same principles, and historians do well to take this dynastic component into account when evaluating specific cases.<sup>42</sup>

One aspect that applies even more nuance to this complex material is the fact that the archducal marriage also went hand in hand with the transfer of sovereignty over the Netherlands to Albert and Isabella. Beginning with the arrival of the infanta in 1599, the court in Brussels was thus no longer the seat of a governor but of two sovereign princes of the blood royal. The meaning and impact of this change in status cannot be easily underestimated. It brought with it definite expectations which could and would not be ignored. John Adamson argues that ‘(...) in the period between roughly 1550 and 1700 there was what might be termed a “standardization of expectations” as to the features that a properly constituted court was expected to possess’.<sup>43</sup> According to Adamson, every self-respecting sovereign court was expected to satisfy definite formal requirements. This was a matter not only of possessing a magnificent palace and displaying luxury and opulence, but also of patronizing the arts and sciences and of demonstrating a profound religiosity. In that sense there is mention of a pattern of expectations that entered into the foreground not only at

Habsburg but at pretty much all Western and Central European courts. At the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century, namely, this pattern would be very strongly applied, as Adamson posits:

What is perhaps the most distinctive aspect of the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century court culture was the gradual acceptance of all, or almost all, of the items on this checklist as being virtually *de rigueur* for any sovereign court that aspired to be taken seriously by its peers. In this regard, studies of new courts are particularly revealing, whether they relate to newly elevated princes, such as the Medici or the Vasa, or to courts 'reinvented' after a relocation or period of abeyance, such as the Sabaudian court after its transference from Chambéry to Turin in 1563. The thoroughness with which these newcomers acquired the 'correct' courtly amenities reveals more than a pattern of copying and emulation. It effectively itemizes what contemporaries regarded as the defining features of a sovereign court.<sup>44</sup>

In a certain sense the archducal court can be seen as a reinvented court. Since the departure of Philip II for Spain in 1559 the court in Brussels had been 'degraded' to a gubernatorial court. Under governess Margaret of Parma, it could still in a way maintain its glorious reputation, but in the turbulent years after that it lost much of its former luster. When Albert and Isabella assumed their posts, it cast off its status as second-rung court and invented itself anew as an independent, autonomous, and – above all – else sovereign court. Through the introduction of the Spanish-Burgundian court ceremonial, which could be seen as the most prestigious in Europe, the archdukes breathed new life into the languishing court. Characterized by a deep-going ritualization of daily life, the new decorum accented their elevated and sacred status as princes of the blood royal – and consequently also the legitimacy of their reign. The archdukes were all too well aware of the political role their court could play. When the archdukes came to power, the Low Countries found themselves to be in a situation of serious instability. For three decades the country had had to suffer from a civil war, with all its economic and social consequences. The wariness among the populace toward the new regime was great. A large number of members of the aristocracy had turned away from the Habsburg dynasty, and under the surface the fear reigned that even more would follow. In that kind of climate the archdukes opted to present their court as a beacon of political quiet and stability. The proliferation of offices and positions in their households made it possible – in combination with the system of *service par terme* – to attract large groups of nobles and to give them access to the renewed market of patronage which came to be developed there. In that way the court would play a defining role in rebuilding the much-plagued Habsburg regime in the Netherlands.

Adamson's argumentation recalls on top of that a hypothesis of Sir John Elliott, who already in 1985 postulated that rulers of small principalities apparently made more efforts to cultivate an image of pomp and grandeur than their counterparts in larger countries, for the simple reason that their legitimacy was called into question more.<sup>45</sup> Building further on this, Brian Weiser, in a study on Charles II and the politics of access, also concludes that 'the very smallness of these principalities encouraged rulers to concentrate on enhancing their image by splendour, distance, and decorum. (...) To counteract their questionable claims on the obedience of their subjects these princes emphasized their glory'.<sup>46</sup> Weiser refers to Milan and Burgundy to underpin his

position, but perhaps the theory goes for the Habsburg Netherlands as well. A few contemporaneous commentators were of the opinion in any case that the archdukes attached strikingly much importance to the image of their court, where ‘glory precedes all other interests and affairs, which they would rather see ruined than to concede even one point’.<sup>47</sup> As Luc Duerloo has shown, Albert and Isabella were especially sensitive to infractions on the decorum and rules of precedence at court.<sup>48</sup> In that context, the French ambassador Mathieu Brulart de Berny sighed, ‘there were no princes in the world more jealous and punctual in these matters than they were’.<sup>49</sup> The English ambassador Lord Doncaster was also able to experience something similar in the flesh. When in 1619 he went for an audience with the archdukes, they refused to offer him a chair. Doncaster interpreted that to be a crude insult and made his complaint, upon which he got to hear drily that he was being given the same treatment as that which in turn had fallen to the Count of Noyelles, the archducal emissary in England, when the latter was received by King James I a few months before that. ‘And this I have almost generally observed in my whole entertaynment here,’ the aggrieved Doncaster wrote, ‘that as in all things wherein [the archdukes] might sett forth the glory of their own magnificence, they have been desirous to exceede the pattern of their ambassador’s usage in England (...), wherein I thinke his Majesty and all the world will judge there is a great overvaluation on their part.’<sup>50</sup>

In fact, with his complaint Doncaster hit the nail on the head. The court of the archdukes was, to be sure, a sovereign but not a royal court. Yet Albert and Isabella insisted on employing a court ceremonial that – following the model of the court at Madrid – was cobbled from a royal model, thus exposing themselves to the courtiers’ criticism that this was somewhat ‘excessive’.<sup>51</sup> Clearly, definite political ambitions were hidden behind this measure. There is indeed no doubt that the aspirations of Albert and Isabella reached further than dominion over the Netherlands. It says much, for example, that the archdukes at the beginning of their rule undertook ardent yet fruitless attempts to have themselves recognized by the pope and the international community as kings of Burgundy – a title that would have catapulted them at once to the top of the pecking order among European princes. On top of that, as the newly wed son of the emperor – with still good hopes for any possible birth of children around 1598 – the archduke was a candidate marked to succeed the childless Rudolf II on the imperial throne.<sup>52</sup> It was an option that the historiography of the archducal reign has dared to forget, but one of which Albert himself was all too well aware. For a long time he saw himself as the future emperor of the Holy Roman Empire – or in any case as having a very great chance at this position. Seen from that angle, the revitalization of the court in Brussels was nothing more than logical. With the introduction of a semi-royal court ceremonial Albert and Isabella anticipated the splendid future that they saw set aside for themselves. It could not be suspected in 1598 that none of those mentioned ambitions would in the end become the truth.

## Conclusion

The observation by the nuncio Bentivoglio supposing that the household of Albert and Isabella rested on the age-old organization of the court of Burgundy, has to be interpreted in the right context. At the time when the nuncio wrote down his report, the

notion of a Burgundian ceremonial had not referred for a long time to the model that had come into being in former times under the Dukes of Burgundy. Rather, it referred to a mishmash of influences that deviated in many ways from the idealized image that Olivier de La Marche had postulated in his memoirs. Although the Burgundian model still made up its core in theoretical respects, the court ceremonial under Charles V and Philip II had devolved into a medley of different traditions, among them perhaps those of Flanders and Brabant, yet in any case those of Castile, Aragon, and possibly even Portugal. On top of that, the accent came to fall more and more emphatically on an attitude of reservedness and *gravitas*, one inspired by the Counter-Reformation and later made one and the same with typical Spanish-Habsburg tradition.<sup>53</sup> The *Casa de Borgoña*, which had defined the face of the court in Madrid at the end of the sixteenth century, was consequently still Burgundian only in name. In practice the royal household had fashioned for itself a character entirely of its own, which, to be sure, exhibited traits of an older precedent, yet differed substantially from it as far as the rest was concerned. This medley of styles, which rapidly acquired the connotation of ‘Spanish,’ was the model that Bentivoglio denoted and that would be introduced at the court of the archdukes in 1599.

According to the local courtiers in Brussels, the new ceremonial clashed with the age-old tradition in the Low Countries, indicating that it was no longer recognized as ‘Burgundian’. In fact, the new rules regarding the accessibility of the archdukes prompted the nobles to complain that Albert was deliberately trying to model his court after that of Philip II in Madrid. This article has argued that, in fact, most contemporaries at the court of Brussels had few means of knowing what exactly that age-old tradition had consisted of. To be sure, their indignation had more to do with the fact that their right of access to the archdukes was now brusquely truncated, preventing them from approaching him and trying to gain his ear whenever they pleased. The fact that the spatial layout of the palace was adapted to accommodate the new rules, indicates that Albert and Isabella were well aware of the importance of access. It might be argued that the principle of a shrewd spatial arrangement for the princely dwelling originally stemmed from the Burgundian court, in which the creation of distance between the duke and his subjects constituted an essential objective. Its finer points were worked out by the Habsburgs, however, with Philip II of Spain as the undisputed champion. It is probable, then, that as an architect Albert was inspired by the example of his uncle, whose palaces in Madrid and San Lorenzo del Escorial exhibited an especially complex spatial organization with an eye to secluding the prince. It is not for nothing that the Spanish-Habsburg monarchy is denoted by some historians as a hidden monarchy, a kingship that was characterized by the splendid isolation of the monarch.<sup>54</sup> In that sense, the well-considered spatial arrangement of the palace at Brussels, identical to that of the royal residences in Spain, might be interpreted as a symbolic legitimization of the authority of Albert and Isabella as sovereign Habsburg princes, and an externalization of their dynastic ambitions.

## Notes

1. The induction itself would take place on 24 December 1599, and was described by the papal nuncio in Brussels at that time, Ottavio Mirto Frangipani. See Archivio Segreto

- Vaticano (hereafter ASV), Nunziatura di Fiandra 11, fol. 740: Nuncio Ottavio Mirto Frangipani to Cardinal-Secretary of State Aldobrandini, 24 December 1599.
2. See Esteban Estringana, "El collar del Toisón y la grandeza de España," 505–7, esp. 509.
  3. ASV, Nunziatura di Fiandra 11, fol. 705–6: Frangipani to Aldobrandini, 18 September 1599.
  4. Ibid.
  5. De Jonge, "t Hof van Brabant," 183–97, here 187.
  6. See Martínez Millán, "The Triumph of the Burgundian Household," 745–72.
  7. Ibid.
  8. See Martínez Millán. "The Political Configuration of the Spanish Monarchy," 21–58.
  9. See Paravicini, "The Court of the Dukes of Burgundy," 69–102.
  10. E.g. Paravicini, *La cour de Bourgogne et l'Europe*; Duindam, "El legado borgoñon en la vida cortesana," 35–58; Noel, "L'etiquette bourguignonne à la cour d'Espagne," 171–91. For the Brussels court, various publications by Krista De Jonge focus on the architectural aspects of the ceremonial. Apart from the article cited in note 5, see De Jonge, "Der herzogliche und kaiserliche Palast zu Brüssel," 253–82; De Jonge, "Le palais de Charles-Quint à Bruxelles," 107–25 ; and De Jonge, "Espacio ceremonial," 61–90.
  11. Bentivoglio, *Relationi del Cardinal Bentivoglio*, 157–61.
  12. For an overview of the organization of the archducal household, see Raeymaekers, *One Foot in the Palace*; and Lanoye, "Structure and Composition of the Household of the Archdukes," 107–19.
  13. E.g. Paravicini, "Europäische Hofordnungen als Gattung und Quelle," 13–20.
  14. de La Marche, "Sensuyt l'estat de la maison du duc Charles de Bourgogne," 1–94.
  15. For an explanation concerning the Burgundian court ceremonial, see Hofmann-Randall, *Das Spanische Hofzeremoniell*, 50–64; Paravicini, "Die Hofordnungen Philipps des Guten von Burgund"; and Cartellieri, *La Cour des ducs de Bourgogne*.
  16. Paravicini, "The Court of the Dukes of Burgundy," 102.
  17. See Delen, *Het hof van Willem van Oranje*, 31.
  18. Hofmann-Randall, *Das Spanische Hofzeremoniell*, 58–9. Concerning the ceremonial at the court of Charles V, see De Ridder, "Les règlements de la Cour de Charles Quint" ; and De Ridder, "La Cour de Charles-Quint," 41–213.
  19. Concerning these adjustments, see Martínez Millán and Fernández Conti, *La Monarquía de Felipe II*, 132–3.
  20. De Jonge, "De voornaamste residenties in Mechelen," 57–66.
  21. Elliott, *Imperial Spain*, 144–59.
  22. Martínez Millán and Fernández Conti, *La Monarquía de Felipe II*, 53–61, 134–5.
  23. Cited in: Delen, *Het hof van Willem van Oranje*, 34.
  24. Ibid., 35 and Kerkhoff, *Maria van Hongarije en haar hof*, 137.
  25. Martínez Millán and Fernández Conti, *La Monarquía de Felipe II*, 61. Surrounding this, see also Rodríguez Salgado, "Honour and profit in the court of Philip II of Spain," especially 67. Furthermore, see Gonzalo Sánchez-Molero, *El aprendizaje cortesano de Felipe II*.
  26. Martínez Millán and Fernández Conti, *La Monarquía de Felipe II*, 61, 136–7; and Rodríguez Salgado, "The Court of Philip II of Spain," 205–44.
  27. It is contested among historians of the matter whether the introduction of the Burgundian court ceremonial into the household of the prince aroused much criticism. See the discussion in Redworth and Checa, "The Courts of the Spanish Habsburgs," 47–51; and Nader, "Habsburg Ceremony in Spain," 296.
  28. Martínez Millán and Fernández Conti, *La Monarquía de Felipe II*, 136.
  29. Rodríguez-Salgado, "Honour and profit," 69.
  30. Delen, *Het hof van Willem van Oranje*, 37.
  31. Hortal Muñoz, "La casa del Archiduque Ernesto," 193–205. See also De Jonge, "Espacio ceremonial."
  32. Duindam, "The Burgundian-Spanish legacy in European Court Life," 203–20.



33. van Vervou, *Enige gedenckvveerdige geschiedenissen, tot narichtinge der nakomelingen*, 1841.
34. See note 3 above.
35. For a thorough analysis of the new route, see Raeymaekers, *One Foot in the Palace*, 200–1.
36. Somerset, *The Travel Diary*, 286–8.
37. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Manuscrits Français 16131, fol. 274: Ambassador Périscard to Secretary of State Puisieux, 20 April 1618.
38. Somerset, *The Travel Diary*, 288.
39. Raeymaekers, *One Foot in the Palace*, 207–8.
40. Adamson, “The Tudor and Stuart Courts,” 108.
41. Raeymaekers, “The Power of Proximity,” 258–79.
42. Vermeir, Raeymaekers, and Hortal Muñoz, “Courts and Households of the Habsburg Dynasty,” 7–19.
43. Adamson, “The Making of the Ancien-Régime Court,” 14.
44. Ibid.
45. Elliott, “Power and Propaganda in the Spain of Philip IV,” 145–73.
46. Weiser, *Charles II and the Politics of Access*. For the quotation, see p. 10.
47. Quoted in Duerloo, *Dynasty and Piety*, 35.
48. Ibid., 34–5.
49. As quoted in *ibid.*, 35.
50. Kew, National Archives, State Papers 77/13, fol. 267: Lord Doncaster to Secretary of State Robert Naunton, 30 May 1619.
51. See note 3 above.
52. Duerloo, *Dynasty and Piety*, 251–2.
53. Redworth and Checa, “The Courts of the Spanish Habsburgs,” 59–61.
54. Ibid., 56–9.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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